Praises and Vows Accepted in Zion

A Sermon
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"Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh more."—Psalm 65:1-2.

UPON Zion there was erected an altar dedicated to God for the offering of sacrifices. Except when prophets were commanded by God to break through the rule, burnt offering was only to be offered there. The worship of God upon the high places was contrary to the divine command: "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee." Hence the tribes on the other side of Jordan, when they erected a memorial altar, disclaimed all intention of using it for the purpose of sacrifice, and said most plainly, "God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the Lord our God that is before his tabernacle."

In fulfillment of this ancient type, we also "have an altar whereof they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle." Into our spiritual worship, no observers of materialistic ritualism may intrude; they have no right to eat at our spiritual altar, and there is no other at which they can eat and live for ever. There is but one altar Jesus Christ our Lord. All other altars are impostures and idolatrous inventions. Whether of stone, or wood, or brass, they are the toys with which those amuse themselves who have returned to the beggarly elements of Judaism, or else the apparatus with which clerical jugglers dupe the sons and daughters of men. Holy places made with hands are now abolished; they were once the figures of the true, but now that the substance has come, the type is done away with. The all-glorious person of the Redeemer, God and Man, is the great center of Zion's temple, and the only real altar of sacrifice. He is the church's head, the church's heart, the church's altar, priest, and all in all. "To him shall the gathering of the be." Around him we all congregate even as the tribes around the tabernacle of the Lord in the wilderness.

When the church is gathered together, we may liken it to the assemblies upon Mount Zion, whither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel. There the song went up, not so much from each separate worshipper as from all combined; there the praise as it rose to heaven was not only the praise of each one, but the praise of all. So where Christ is the center, where his one sacrifice is the altar whereon all offerings are

laid; and where the church unites around that common center, and rejoices in that one sacrifice, there is the true Zion. If we this evening —gathering in Christ's name, around his one finished sacrifice, present our prayers and praises entirely to the Lord through Jesus Christ, we are "come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." This is Zion, even this house in the far-off islands of the Gentiles, and we can say indeed and of a truth, "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion; and unto thee shall the vow be performed."

We shall, with devout attention, notice two things: the first *is our holy worship, which we desire to render;* and then the encouragement, *the stimulative encouragement, which God provides for us:* "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

I. First, let us consider the HOLY OFFERING OF WORSHIP WHICH WE DESIRE TO PRESENT TO GOD. It is twofold: there is praise, and there is also a vow, a praise that waiteth, and a vow of which performance is promised.

Let us think, first of all, of *the praise.* This is the chief ingredient of the adoration of heaven; and what is thought to be worthy of the world of glory, ought to be the main portion of the worship of earth. Although we shall never cease to pray as long as we live here below, and are surrounded by so many wants, yet we should never so pray as to forget to praise. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is heaven," must never be left out because we are pressed with want, and therefore hasten to cry, "Give us this day our daily bread." It will be a sad hour when the worship of the church shall be only a solemn wail. Notes of exultant thanksgiving should ever ascend from her solemn gatherings. "Praise the Lord O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion." "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Let it abide as a perpetual ordinance, while sun and moon endure, "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion." Never think little of praise, since holy angels and saints made perfect count it their life-long joy, and even the Lord himself saith, "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me." The tendency, I fear, among us has been to undervalue praise as a part of public worship, whereas it should be second to nothing. We frequently hear of prayer-meetings, and but seldom of praise-meetings. We acknowledge the duty of prayer by setting apart certain times for it; we do not always so acknowledge the duty of praise. I hear of "family prayer;" do I always hear of "family praise?" I know you cultivate private prayer: are you as diligent also in private thanksgiving and secret adoration of the Lord? In everything we are to give thanks; it is as much an apostolic precept as that other, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, make your requests known unto God." I have often said to you, dear brethren, that prayer and praise are like the breathing in and out of the air, and make up that spiritual respiration by which the inner life is instrumentally supported. We take in an inspiration of heavenly air as we pray: we breathe it out again in

praise unto God, from whom it came; if, then, we would be healthy in spirit, let us be abundant in thanksgiving. Prayer, like the root of a tree, seeks for and finds nutriment; praise, like the fruit, renders a revenue to the owner of the vineyard. Prayer is for ourselves, praise is for God; let us never be so selfish as to abound in the one and fail in the other. Praise is a slender return for the boundless favors we enjoy; let us not be slack in rendering it in our best music, the music of a devout soul. "Praise the Lord; for the Lord is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant."

Let us notice the praise which is mentioned in our text, which is to be so large a matter of concern to the Zion of God whenever the saints are met together.

You will observe, first, that it is praise *exclusively rendered to God.* "Praise waiteth for *thee, O God,* in Zion." "Praise for *thee,* and *all* the praise for thee," and no praise for man or for any other who may be thought to be, or may pretend to be, worthy of praise. Have I not sometimes gone into places called houses of God where the praise has waited for a woman—for the Virgin, where praise has waited for the saints, where incense has smoked to heaven, and songs and prayers have been sent up to deceased martyrs and confessors who are supposed to have power with God? In Rome it is so, but in Zion it is not so. Praise waiteth for thee, O *Mary,* in Babylon; but praise waiteth for thee, O *God,* in Zion. Unto God, and unto God alone, the praise of his true church must ascend. If Protestants are free from this deadly error, I fear they are guilty of another, for in our worship, we too often minister unto our own selves. We do so when we make the tune and manner of the song to be more important than the matter of it. I am afraid that where organs, choirs, and singing men and singing women are left to do the praise of the congregation, men's minds are more occupied with the due performance of the music, than with the Lord, who alone is to be praised. God's house is meant to be sacred unto himself, but too often it is made an opera-house, and Christians form an audience, not an adoring assembly. The same thing may, unless great care be taken, happen amid the simplest worship, even though everything which does not savor of gospel plainness is excluded, for in that case we may drowsily drawl out the words and notes, with no heart whatever. To sing with the soul, this only is to offer acceptable song! We come not together to amuse ourselves, to display our powers of melody or our aptness in creating harmony we come to pay our adoration at the footstool of the Great King, to whom alone be glory for ever and ever. True praise is for God—for God alone.

Brethren, you must take heed lest the minister, who would, above all, disclaim a share of praise, should be set up as a demi-god among you. Refute practically the old slander that presbyter is only priest writ large. Look higher than the pulpit, or you will be disappointed. Look far above an arm of flesh, or it will utterly fail you. We may say of the best preacher upon the earth, "Give God the praise, for we know that this man is a sinner." If we thought that you paid superstitious reverence to us, we would, like Paul and Silas at Lystra, rend our clothes, and cry, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you,

and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein." It is not to any man, to any priest, to any order of men, to any being in heaven or earth beside God, that we should burn the incense of worship. We would as soon worship cats with the Egyptians, as popes with the Romanists: we see no difference between the people whose gods grew in their gardens and the sect whose deity is made by their baker. Such vile idolatry is to be loathed. To God alone shall all the praise of Zion ascend.

It is to be feared that some of our praise ascends nowhere at all, but it in as though it were scattered to the winds. We do not always realize God. Now, "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek trim;" this is as true of praise as of prayer. "God is a Spirit," and they that praise him must praise him "in spirit and in truth," for "the Father seeketh such" to praise him, and only such; and, if we do not lift our eyes and our hearts to him, we are but misusing words and wasting time. Our praise is not as it should be, if it be not reverently and earnestly directed to the Lord of Hosts. Vain is it to shoot arrows without a target: we must aim at God's glory in our holy songs, and that exclusively.

Note, next, that *it should be continual.* "Praise *waiteth* for thee, O God, in Zion." Some translators conceive that the main idea is that of continuance. It remains; it abides; for Zion does loot break up when the assembly is gone. We do not leave the holiness in the material house, for it never was in the stone and the timber, but only in the living amenably of the faithful.

"Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy-seat;
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallow'd ground,
For thou within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humble mind;
Such ever bring thee where they come,
And going, take thee to their home."

The people of God, as they never cease to be a church, should maintain the Lord's praise perpetually as a community. Their assemblies should begin with praise and end with praise, and ever be conducted in a spirit of praise. There should be in all our solemn assemblies a spiritual incense altar, always smoking with "the pure incense of sweet spices, mingled according to the art of the apothecary": the thanksgiving which is made up of humility, gratitude, love, consecration, and holy joy in the Lord. It should be for the Lord alone, and it should never go out day nor night. "His mercy endureth for ever:" let our praises endure for ever. He makes the outgoings of the morning to rejoice, let us celebrate the rising of the sun with holy psalm and hymn. He makes the closing in of the evening to be glad, let him

have our vesper praise. "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts." Could his mercy cease, there might be some excuse for staying our praises: but, even should it seem to be so, men who love the Lord would say with Job, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not also receive evil? The Lord gave, end the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord." Let our praise abide, continue, remain, and be perpetual. It was a good idea of Bishop Farrar, that, in his own house he would keep up continual praise to God, and as, with a large family and household, he numbered just twenty-four, he set apart each one for an hour in the day to be engaged specially in prayer and praise, that he might girdle the day with a circle of worship. We could not do that. To attempt it might on our part be superstition; but to fall asleep blessing God, to rise in the night to meditate on him, and when we wake in the morning to feel our hearts leap in the prospect of his presence during the day, this is attainable, and we ought to reach it. It is much to be desired that all day long, in every avocation, and every recreation, the soul should spontaneously pour forth praise, even as birds sing, and flowers perfume the air, and sunbeams cheer the earth. We would be incarnate psalmody, praise enshrined in flesh and blood. From this delightful duty we would desire no cessation, and ask no pause. "Praise *waits* for thee, O God, in Zion;" thy praise may come and go, from the outside world, where all things ebb and flow, for it lies beneath the moon, and there is no stability in it; but amidst thy people, who dwell in thee, and who possess eternal life—in them thy praise perpetually abides.

A third point, however, is clear upon the surface of the words. "Praise *waiteth* for thee"—as though *praise must always be humble.* The servants "wait" in the king's palace. There the messengers stand girt for any mission; the servitors wait, prepared to obey; and the courtiers surround the throne, all eager to receive the royal smile and to fulfill the high command. Our praises ought to stand, like ranks of messengers, waiting to hear what God's will is; for this is to praise him, Furthermore, true praise lies in the actual doing of the divine will, even this,—to pause in sacred reverence until God the Lord shall speak, whatever that will may be; it is true praise to wait subserviently on him. Praises may be looked upon as servants who delight to obey their master's bidding. There is such a thing as an unholy familiarity with God; this age is not so likely to fall into it as some ages have been, for there is little familiarity with God of any sort now; public worship becomes more formal, and stately, and distant. The intense nearness to God which Luther enjoyed—how seldom do we meet with it! But, however near we come to God, still he *is God,* and we are his creatures. He is, it is true, "our Father," but be it ever remembered that he is "our Father which art in heaven." "Our *Father*"—therefore near and intimate: "our Father *in heaven,*" therefore we humbly, solemnly bow in his presence. There is a familiarity that runs into presumption: there is another familiarity, is so sweetly tempered with humility that it doth not intrude.

"Praise waiteth for thee" with a servant's livery on, a servant's ear to hear, and a servant's heart to obey. Praise bows at thy foot-stool, feeling that it is still an unprofitable servant.

But, perhaps, you are aware, dear friends, that there are other translations of this verse. "Praise waiteth for thee," may be read, "Praise is silent unto thee"—"is silent before thee." One of the oldest Latin commentators reads it, "Praise and silence belong unto thee;" and Dr. Gill tells us, that in the King of Spain's Bible, it runs "The praise of angels is only silence before thee, O Jehovah," so that when we do our best our highest praise is but silence before God, and we must praise him *with confession of shortcomings.* Oh, that we too, as our poet puts it, might,

"Loud as his thunders speak his praise,
And sound it lofty as his throne!"

But we cannot do that, and when our notes are most uplifted, and our hearts most joyous, we have not spoken all his praise. Compared to what his nature and glory deserve, our most earnest praise has been little more than silence. Oh, brethren, have you not often felt it to be so? Those who are satisfied with formal worship, think that they have done well when the music has been correctly sung; but those who worship God in spirit, feel that they cannot magnify him enough. They blush over the hymns they sing, and retire from the assembly of the saints mourning that they have fallen far short of his glory. O for an enlarged mind, rightly to conceive the divine majesty; next fur the gift of utterance to clothe the thought in fitting language; and then for a voice like many waters, to sound forth the noble strain. Alas! as yet, we are humbled at our failures to praise the Lord as we would.

"Words are but air, and tongues but clay,
And his compassions are divine;

How, then, shall we proclaim to men God's glory? When we have done our best, our praise is but silence before the merit of his goodness, and the grandeur of his greatness.

Yet it may be well to observe here, that the praise which God accepts, presents itself *under a variety of forms.* There is praise for God in Zion, and it is often spoken; but there is often praise for God in Zion, and it is silence. There are some who cannot sing vocally, but perhaps, before God, they sing best. There are some, I know, who sing very harshly and inharmoniously—that is to say, to our ears; and yet God may accept them rather than the noise of stringed instruments carefully touched. There is a story told of Rowland Hill's being much troubled by a good old lady who would sit near him and sing with a most horrible voice, and very loudly— as those people generally do who sing badly—and he at last begged her not to sing so loudly. But when she said, "It comes from my heart," the honest man of God retracted his rebuke, and said, "Sing away, I should be sorry to stop you." When praise comes from the heart, who would wish to restrain it. Even the shouts of the old Methodists, their "hallelujahs" and "glorys," when uttered in fervor, were not to be forbidden; for if these should hold their peace, even the stones would cry out. But there are times when those who

sing, and sing well, have too much praise in their soul for it to enclose itself in words. Like some strong liquors which cannot use a little vent, but foam and swell until they burst each hoop that binds the barrel; so, sometimes, we want a larger channel for our soul than that of mouth and tongue, and we long to have all our nerves and sinews made into harpstrings, and all the pores of our body made mouths of thankfulness. Oh, that we could praise with our whole nature, not one single hair of our heads, or drop of blood in our veins, keeping back from adoring the Most High! When this desire for praise is most vehement, we fall back upon silence, and quiver with the adoration which we cannot speak. Silence becomes our praise.

"A sacred reverence cheeks our songs,
And praise sits silent on our tongues."

It would be well, perhaps, in our public service, if we had more often the sweet relief of silence. I am persuaded that silence, ay, frequent silence, is most beneficial; and the occasional unanimous silence of all the saints when they bow before God would, perhaps, better express, and more fully promote, devout feeling than any hymns which have been composed or songs that could be sung. To make silence a part of worship habitually might be affectation and formalism, but to introduce it occasionally, and even frequently into the service, would be advantageous and profitable. Let us, then, by our silence, praise God, and let us always confess that our praise, compared with God's deserving, is but silence.

I would add that there is in the text the idea that praise waits for God *expectantly*. When we praise God, we expect to see more of him by and by, and therefore wait for him. We bless the King, but we desire to draw nearer to him. We magnify him for what we have seen, and we expect to see more. We praise him in his outer courts, for we shall soon be with him in the heavenly mansions. We glorify him for the revelation of himself in Jesus, for we expect to be like Christ, and to be with him where he is. When I cannot praise God for what I am, I will praise him for what I shall be. When I feel dull and dead about the present, I will take the words of our delightful hymn and say,

"And a near song is in my mouth,
To long-loved music set;
Glory to thee for all the grace
I have not tasted yet."

My praise shall not only be the psalmody of the past, which is but discharging a debt of gratitude, but my faith shall anticipate the future, and wait upon God to fulfill his purposes; and I will begin to pay my praise even before the mercy comes.

Dear brethren and sisters, let us for a moment present our praise to God, each one of us on his own account. We have our common mercies. We call them common, but, oh, how priceless they are. Health to be able to come here and not to be stretched on a bed of sickness, I count this better than bags of gold. To have our reason, and not to be confined in yonder

asylum; to have our children still about us and dear relatives spared still to us—to have bread to eat and raiment to put on—to have been kept from defiling our character—to have been preserved to-day from the snares of the enemy! These are godlike mercies, and for all these our praises shall wait upon God.

But oh! take up the thoughts suggested by the psalm itself in the next verse, and you will doubly praise God. "Iniquities prevail against me. As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away." Infinite love has made us clean every whit!—though we were black and filthy. We are washed —washed in priceless blood. Praise him for this! Go on with the passage, "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee." Is not the blessing of access to God an exceeding choice one? Is it a light thing to feel that, though once far off, we are made nigh through the blood of Christ; and this because of electing love! "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest." Ye subjects of eternal choice, can you be silent? Has God favored you above others, and can your lips refuse to sing? No, you will magnify the Lord exceedingly, because he hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure. Let us read on, and praise God that we have an abiding place among his people—"That he may dwell in thy courts."—Blessed be God we are not to be cast forth and driven out after a while, but we have an entailed inheritance amongst the sons of God. We praise him that we have the satisfaction of dwelling in his house as children. "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." But I close the psalm, and simply say to you, there are ten thousand reasons for taking down the harp from the willows; and I know no reason for permitting it to hang there idle. There are ten thousand times ten thousand reasons for speaking well of "him who loved us, and gave himself for us." "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad." I remember hearing in a prayer-meeting this delightful verse mutilated in prayer, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof *we desire to be* glad." Oh, brethren, I dislike mauling, and mangling, and adding to a text of Scripture. If we are to have the Scriptures revised, let it be by scholars, and not by every ignoramus. "*Desire* to be glad," indeed? This is fine gratitude to God when he hath done great things for us." If these great things have been done, our souls must be glad, and cannot help it; they must overflow with gratitude to God for all his goodness.

2. So much on the first part of our holy sacrifice. Attentively let us consider the second, namely, *the vow.* "Unto thee shall the vow be performed."

We are not given to vow-making in these days. Time was when it was far oftener done. It may be that had we been better men we should have made more vows; it may possibly be that had we been more foolish men we should have done the same. The practice was so abused by superstition, that devotion has grown half-ashamed of it. But we have, at any rate, most of us bound ourselves with occasional vows. I do confess to-day a vow I have not kept as I should desire; the vow made on my first *conversion.* I surrendered myself, body, soul, and spirit, to him that bought me with a price, and the vow was not made by way of excess of

devotion or supererogation, it was but my reasonable service. *You* have done that. Do you remember the love of your espousals, the time when Jesus was very precious, and you had just entered into the marriage bond with him? You gave yourselves up to him, to be his for ever and for ever. O brethren and sisters, it is a part of worship to perform that vow. Renew it to-night, make another surrender of yourselves to him whose you are and whom you serve. Say to-night, as I will, with you, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar." Oh, for another thong to strap the victim to the altar-horn! Does the flesh struggle? Then let it be more fastly bound, never to escape from the altar of God.

Beloved, many of us did, in effect, make a most solemn vow at the time of our *baptism.* We were buried with Christ in baptism unto death, and, unless we were greatly dissembling, we avowed that we were dead in Christ and buried with him; wherein, also, we professed that we were risen with him. Now, shall the world live in those who are dead to it, and shall Christ's life be absent from those who are risen with him? We gave ourselves up there and then, in that solemn act of mystic burial. Recall that scene, I pray you; and as you do it blush, and ask God that your vow may yet be performed, as Doddridge well expresses it:—

"Baptised into your Saviour's death
Your souls to sin must die;
With Christ your Lord ye live anew,
With Christ ascend on high."

Some such vow we made, too, when we *united ourselves to the church of God.* There was an understood compact between us and the church, that we would serve it, that we would seek to honor Christ by holy living, increase the church by propagating the faith, seek its unity, its comfort, by our own love and sympathy with the members. We had no right to join with the church if we did not mean to give ourselves up to it, under Christ, to aid in its prosperity and increase. There was a stipulation made, and a covenant understood, when we entered into communion and league with our brethren in Christ. How about that? Can we say that, as unto God and in his sight, the vow has been performed? Yes, we have been true to our covenant in a measure, brethren. Oh, that it were more fully so! Some of us made another vow, when we gave ourselves, as I trust, under divine call, altogether to the work of the *Christian ministry;* and though we have taken no orders, and received no earthly ordination, for we are no believers in man-made priests, yet tacitly it is understood that the man who becomes a minister of the church of God is to give his whole time to his work—that body, soul, and spirit should be thrown into the cause of Christ. Oh, that this vow were more fully performed by pastors of the church! You, my brethren, elders and deacons, when you accepted office, you knew what the church meant. She expected holiness and zeal of you. The Holy Ghost made you overseers that you might feed the flock of God. Your office proves your obligation. You are practically under a vow. Has that vow been performed? Have you performed it in Zion unto the Lord?

Besides that, it has been the habit of godly men to make *vows* occasionally, in times of pain, and losses, and affliction. Did not the psalm we just now sang it so?—

"Among the saints that fill thine house,
My offerings shall be paid;
There shall my zeal perform the vows
My soul in anguish made.
Now I am thine, for ever thine,
Nor shall my purpose move!
Thy hand hath loosed my bands of pain,
And bound me with thy love.
Here in thy courts I leave my vow,
And thy rich grace record;
Witness, ye saints, who hear me now,
If I forsake the Lord."

You said, "If I am ever raised up, and my life is prolonged, it shall be better spent." You said, also, "If I am delivered out of this great trouble, I hope to consecrate my substance more to God." Another time you said, "If the Lord will return to me the light of his countenance, and bring me out of this depressed state of mind, I will praise him more than ever before." Have you remembered all this? Coming here myself so lately from a sick bed, I at this time preach to myself. I only wish I had a better hearer; I would preach to myself in this respect, and say, "I charge thee, my heart, to perform thy vow." Some of us, dear friends, have made vows in time of joy, the season of the birth of the first-born child, the recovery of the wife from sickness, the merciful restoration that we have ourselves received, times of increasing goods, or seasons when the splendor of God's face has been unveiled before our wondering eye. Have we not made vows, like Jacob when he woke up from his wondrous dream, and took the stone which had been his pillow, and poured oil on its top, and made a vow unto the Most High? We have all had our Bethels. Let us remember that God has heard us, and let us perform unto him our vow which our soul made in her time of joy. But I will not try to open the secret pages of your private note-books. You have had tender passages, which you would not desire me to read aloud: the tears start at their memory. If your life were written, you would say, "Let these not be told; they were only between God and my soul"—some chaste and blessed love passages between you and Christ, which must not be revealed to men. Have you forgotten how then you said, "I am my beloved's, and he is mine," and what you promised when you saw all his goodness made to pass before you. I have now to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, and bid you present unto the Lord to-night the double offering of your heart's praise and of your performed vow. "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together."

II. And now, time will fail me, but I must have a few words upon THE BLESSED ENCOURAGEMENT afforded us in the text for the presentation of these offerings unto God. Here it is,—"O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come?"

Observe, here, that *God hears prayer.* It is, in some aspects, the lowest form of worship, and yet he accepts it. It is not the worship of heaven, and it is, in a measure, selfish. Praise is superior worship, for it is elevating; it is the utterance of a soul that has received good from God, and is returning its love to him in acknowledgment. Praise has a sublime aspect. Now, observe, if praiser is heard, then praise will be heard too. If the lower form, on weaker wing as it were, reaches the throne of the majesty on high, how much more shall the seraphic wing of praise bear itself into the divine presence. Prayer is heard of God: therefore our praises and vows will be. And this is a very great encouragement, because it seems terrible to pray when you are not heard, and discouraging to praise God if he will not accept it. What would be the use of it? But if prayer and yet more praise be most surely heard, ah, brethren, then let us continue and abide in thanksgiving. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me, saith the Lord."

Observe too according to the text, that *all* prayer, if it be true prayer, is heard of God, for so it is put—"Unto thee shall *all flesh* come." Oh, how glad I am at that word. My poor prayer—shall God reject it? Yes, I might have feared so if he had said, "Unto thee shall all *spirits* come." Behold, my brethren, he takes the grosser part as it were, and looks at prayer in his infinite compassion, perceiving it to be what it is—a feeble thing—a cry coming from poor fallen flesh, and yet he puts it, "Unto thee shall all *flesh* come. My broken prayer, my groaning prayer shall get to thee, though it seems to me a thing of flesh, it is nevertheless wrought in me by thy Spirit. And, O my God, my song, though my voice be hoarse and oftentimes my notes most feeble, shall reach thee. Though I groan because it is so imperfect, yet even that shall come to thee. Prayer, if true, shall be received of God, notwithstanding all its faultiness, through Jesus Christ. Then so it will be with our praises and our vows.

Again, prayer is always and habitually received of God. "O thou that *hearest* prayer." Not that didst hear it or on a certain occasion may have heard it, but thou that *ever* hearest prayer. If he always hears prayer, then he always hears praise. Is not this delightful to think of my praise, though it be but that of a child or a poor unworthy sinner—God does hear it, does accept it, in spite of its imperfections, and does accept it *always?* Oh, I will have another hymn to-morrow, I will sing a new song to-morrow. I will forget my pain, I will forget for a moment all my care, and if I cannot sing aloud by reason of those that are with me, yet will I set the bells of my heart ringing, I will make my whole soul full of praise. If I cannot let it out of my mouth, I will praise him in my soul, because he always hears me. You know it is hard to do things for one who never accepts what you do. Many a wife has said, "Oh! it is hard. My husband never seems pleased. I have done all I can, but he takes no notice of little deeds of kindness." But how easy it is to serve a person who, when you have done any

little thing, saw, "How kind it was of you" and thinks much of it. Ah, poor child of God, the Lord thinks much of thy praises, much of thy vows, much of thy prayers. Therefore, be not slack to praise and magnify him unceasingly.

And this all the more, because we have not quite done with that word, "Unto thee shall *all* flesh come." All flesh shall come because the Lord hears prayer. Then all my praises will be heard and all the praises of all sorts of men, if sincere, come unto God. The great ones of the earth shall present praise, and the poorest of the poor also, for thou shalt not reject them.

And, Lord, wilt thou put it so; "Unto thee shall all flesh come," and wilt thou say, "but not such a one?" Wilt thou exclude me? Brethren, fear not that God will reject you. I remind you of what I told you the other night concerning a good earnest believing woman, who in prayer said, "Lord, I am content to be the second thou shalt forsake, but I cannot be the first." The Lord says all flesh shall come to him, and it is implied that he will receive them when they come—all sorts of men, all classes and conditions of men. Then he cannot reject me if I go, nor my prayers if I pray, nor my praise if I praise him, nor my vows if I perform them. Come then, let us praise the Lord, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

I have done when I have said this. Dear brethren and sisters, there may be difficulties in your way; iniquities may hinder you, or infirmities; but there is the promise, "thou shalt purge them away." Infirmities may check you, but note the word of divine help, "Blessed is the man whom thou causest to approach unto thee." He will come to your aid, and lead you to himself. Infirmities, therefore, are overcome by divine grace. Perhaps your emptiness hinders you: "He shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house." It is not your goodness that is to satisfy either God or you, but God's goodness is to satisfy. Come, then, with thine iniquity, come with thine infirmity; come with thy emptiness. Come, dear brethren, if you have never come to God before. Come and confess your sin to God, and ask for mercy; you can do no less than ask. Come and trust his mercy, which endures for ever; it has no limit. Think not hardly of him, but come and lay yourself down at his feet. If you perish, perish there. Come and tell your grief; pour out your hearts before him. Bottom upwards turn the vessel of your nature, and drain out the last dreg, and pray to be filled with the fullness of his grace. Come unto Jesus; he invites you, he enables you. A cry from that pew will reach the sacred ear: "You have not prayed before," you say. Everything must have a beginning. Oh that that beginning might come now. It is not because you pray well that you are to come, but because the Lord hears prayer graciously, therefore, all flesh shall come. You are welcome; none can say you nay. Come! 'tis mercy's welcome hour. May the Lord's bands of love be cast about you; may you be drawn now to him. Come by way of the cross; come resting in the precious atoning sacrifice, believing in Jesus; and he has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." The grace of our Lord be with you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 65.